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INJURED DJOKOVIC EXITS AFTER 1st SET

Melbourne: Novak Djokovic retired injured from his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev after first set (6-7) and left the court to boos, with defending champ Jannik Sinner to face the German for the title. Top-ranked Sinner blew past Ben Shelton 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 despite a painful cramp in the second semis to set up meeting on Sunday | P17

Effects of explosion felt in nearby areas; 2nd blast in an ordnance factory in recent months

8 killed, 7 injured in blast at Maha ordnance factory

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

AT least eight persons were killed and seven others injured in a massive blast at the ordnance factory at Jawahar Nagar area of Bhandara district in Maharashtra on Friday. The explosion occurred around 10.30 am in the low temperature plastic explosive (LTP) section, causing the roof to collapse and trapping more than a dozen workers.

R K Yadav, joint general manager, Ordnance Factory Bhandara, said 13 people have been rescued from the accident site and five among them have been shifted to a local hospital.

The blast was of such high intensity that it was heard from as far as 5 kilometres away. A thick smoke was seen rising from the factory in a video captured from a distance.

A rescue and relief team comprising fire brigade, local administration, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and medical teams reached the spot within minutes of the explosion, an official said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on X, "My condolences to the bereaved families. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured."

Bhandara district Collector Sanjay Kolte said the blast led to a roof collapse at the site that trapped over a dozen workers. The district administration has ordered a probe.

Four among the deceased workers were identified as Chandrashekhar Goswami (59), Manoj Meshram (55), Ajay Nagdeve (51), and Ankit Barai (21).

Union minister Nitin Gadkari termed the explosion an unfortunate incident. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced ₹5 lakh each to the family of those killed in the blast.

On October 22, 2024, two workers were killed and 15 others injured in a blast at the ordnance factory at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.

(With inputs from Mumbai)

Deeply saddened to know about the blast at Ordnance Factory at Bhandara. All efforts are being made to provide aid to those affected — Rajnath Singh, Defence Minister

Smoke billows from the ordnance factory in Bhandara on Friday | PTI

21-YEAR-OLD AMONG THE DECEASED

NAGPUR: The blast was so powerful that residents of three villages in the vicinity felt its impact, said relatives of a 21-year-old apprentice, Ankit Barai, who died. He had joined the factory last year

Trump begins mass deportation drive

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE new US administration under Donald Trump has started deporting undocumented immigrants, the White House said on Friday.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the authorities "arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals" on Thursday, adding that "hundreds" were deported by military aircraft.

"Just as he promised, President Trump is sending a strong message to the world: those who enter the United States illegally will face serious consequences," the White House said.

Tough action against illegal immigration was a major poll promise that Trump set out to fulfil soon after his inauguration as US President on January 20.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, over 11 million people are staying in the US illegally. A few thousand Indians are reportedly also among the undocumented.

Meanwhile, India on Friday reiterated its position that it will take back undocumented Indians, adding that New Delhi is against illegal immigration.

"For Indians not just in the US, but anywhere in the world, if they are Indian nationals and they are overstaying, or they are in a particular country without proper documentation, we will take them back provided documents are shared with us so that we can verify their nationality and that they are indeed Indians," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

Oppn MPs suspended from JPC on Waqf

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

THE meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf Amendment Bill witnessed unruly scenes on Friday after 10 opposition members were suspended for a day amid accusations against Chairman Jagdambika Pal of steamrolling through the proceedings.

Later, the suspended MPs wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, alleging Pal suspended them after he received a phone call during the meeting.

The MPs said the JPC chairman does not have the power to suspend them and demanded that the proceedings be conducted in a fair manner.

On his part, Pal alleged the Opposition MPs were trying to disrupt the meeting, adding that TMC member Kalyan Banerjee verbally abused him.

The suspended MPs include TMC's Banerjee, Congress' Naseer Hussain and Md Jawed, DMK's A Raja, and AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi.

The ruckus began after some members questioned the change in the date of the meet. "After the January 21 meeting, we were told the next meeting would be on January 24-25," said Raja, adding the Opposition sought it be held after January 30, but the chairman did not respond to their request.

EXPRESS INTAKE

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Bangladeshi woman killed, rape suspected | P3

India takes up 'Emergency' with UK | PT1

Over 80k kg drugs destroyed in Ujjain cement factory | P12

K'taka to formulate bill to rein in microfinance firms

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state government is planning to formulate 'Karnataka Microfinance Institutions (Regulation of Money Lending) Bill' to rein in microfinance companies. This is in view of the increasing number of complaints accusing such companies of harassing those unable to clear loans taken from them.

Disclosing this to reporters here on Friday after a cabinet meeting, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other central finance agencies are not able to control microfinance companies. "We are tabling the Karnataka Microfinance Institutions (Regulation of Money Lending) Bill at a meeting convened by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday," Patil said.

The meeting will discuss measures to be taken to stop such lending companies from harassing borrowers, especially farmers, in rural areas, he said.

Asked if finance companies can't be controlled under existing laws, Patil said they are not strong. Police have limited powers to handle such cases. "We have to plug the loopholes," he added.He said the state government has taken the issue seriously and a special law is expected soon to control such lending companies.

Meanwhile, Home Minister G Parameshwara said many complaints have been received against microfinance companies from across the state.

Banks and other financial agencies have powers to recover loans. At the same time, there are laws to protect the interests of borrowers. But they are not effective. Steps will be taken to bring in an effective law, he said. MORE: P4

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